

Petition –

Presented by Mark Bostock

To be presented on Thursday, 15th April 2021

*To the Right Honourable The Lord Mayor, Aldermen and Commons
of the City of London in Common Council assembled.*

Petition:-

"We, the undersigned, declare that we have no confidence in the City of London Corporation's current planning process and petition the Court of Common Council to:

1. reject a proposal that planning applications be decided by panels of the Planning and Transportation Committee instead of by the whole Committee to avoid eroding democratic accountability;
2. prevent those councillors who are members of committees responsible for the Corporation's extensive property interests from also being members of the Planning and Transportation Committee, to avoid conflicts of interest; and
3. prevent those councillors who have professional associations within the property development industry from also being members of the Planning and Transportation Committee, to avoid a perception of bias.

Background

Democratic accountability is already weak within the Corporation because a majority of councillors are (uniquely) elected by small numbers of voters appointed by businesses, only a quarter of which register to vote. As a consequence of this business vote, the Planning and Transportation Committee generally ignores reasonable objections made on planning grounds, especially by residents and heritage bodies, and approves ever taller buildings which blight neighbouring properties and degrade heritage assets. Allocating decisions to panels will exacerbate this existing problem.

Recent examples of bad planning decisions include:

- 150 Aldersgate Street (opposite the Grade II listed Barbican Estate): Plans were approved to refurbish the existing office building making it taller, thereby reducing the daylight to the surrounding homes and businesses, and overshadowing the Smithfield Conservation Area. The Corporation had an undisclosed interest in this application as the freeholder of the property. It benefited financially from the approval, which would not have been granted but for the votes of five councillors on the Planning and Transportation Committee who also sat on a committee which manages the Corporation's property interests, including this property. The debate was prematurely terminated on a motion by one of these councillors.

- The Denizen: The Corporation sold a building formerly used for police accommodation on this site to a developer, which demolished it and built this large block of luxury flats. The block has caused a severe loss of light to a number of homes in Grade II listed Golden Lane Estate.
- 55 Gracechurch Street: Approval was recently granted for this 29 storey office block outside the approved “eastern cluster”, which will harm views of Tower Bridge and the Monument, both Grade I.
- 70 Gracechurch Street: Approval was recently granted for this 33 storey office block, which will literally overshadow the roof of Grade II* listed Leadenhall Market.

Transparency International published recommendations in February 2021 for improvements in the Corporation’s planning process, which the Corporation is refusing even to consider.

Future developments could include Bastion House on London Wall and the Museum of London site, both abutting the Barbican Estate in the West of the City, and two developments in the East of the City which will both affect the Grade I listed Bevis Marks synagogue.”

[Signatures appended to the Petition at the time of receipt by the Town Clerk’s Office: 1,222]

[Signatures appended to the Petition at the time of publication of the Court agenda: 1,248]

Member presenting the Petition, pursuant to Standing Order No. 20:-

Mark Bostock

(Ward of Cripplegate)

Recommendation:-

That the Petition, having been presented to the City of London Corporation, be referred to the Policy & Resources and Planning & Transportation Committees for consideration.